

I rise today to support the health reform package we are debating today. It is an important, very beneficial step in America's history.

I see the need for this legislation when I meet with my constituents, read their letters, and talk with them on the phone. A woman from Pennington, New Jersey called me yesterday. She was concerned that she would lose her job due to state budget cuts in New Jersey, which would mean that she would lose her health coverage as well. She told me her worries about finding affordable coverage while she looks for a new job and tries to keep food on her table. To complicate her situation, she has a pre-existing condition. This means that even if she could afford health care, it is possible she could be denied due to her pre-existing condition.

This woman's story is not unique. At a roundtable in Trenton, a spouse of a cancer patient told me that when she and her husband came home from the hospital after one extensive treatment, they returned to foot-high stacks of insurance paperwork and \$150,000 of out-of-pocket charges for her husband's needed care. A self-employed woman from East Brunswick wrote to me to let me know she pays \$2,000 a month for her family's coverage and still sometimes has to pay out-of-pocket to see physicians.

I vote for health reform to help middle-class women and men just like these hardworking New Jerseyans, who play by the rules and still find health coverage out of reach.

Once reform goes into effect, families and small businesses will have more control over their own health care.

Families with health insurance through their employers would benefit from caps on yearly out-of-pocket costs. Seniors would find that Medicare not only remains intact, but is improved--recipients would receive free preventive care and better primary care. Small businesses would have more health insurance options and additional support for their health insurance expenses. Patients with diseases such as diabetes or cancer would be able to obtain insurance without being turned away because of their pre-existing condition.

The benefits of this health reform would be felt immediately upon enactment of the health insurance reform package. For example, small business owners who provide insurance for their employees would receive tax credits, families would no longer face annual or lifetime caps on their insurance benefits, and seniors with high prescription drug costs would receive \$250 of additional assistance in their Medicare prescription drug plan.

The health reform package would do all these things while reducing the deficit by \$138 billion for the first ten years and by \$1.2 trillion in the next ten years.

Today's vote is the culmination of over a century of debate about health reform. Since Teddy Roosevelt ran for President in 1912, our nation has been debating how to ensure that sick Americans can access the care they need. This Congress has been debating this health reform legislation in one of the most thorough processes in recent memory. During the past few years, the House of Representatives has held 79 bipartisan hearings on health insurance reform, debated 239 amendments, and heard from 181 witnesses.

The vote today brings this extensive process to a close at least here in the house, finally passing health reform legislation that will provide secure coverage to all Americans, ensure families have stable costs, and improve Medicare for our seniors.

I urge my colleagues to vote in favor of this health reform package to provide health security to our nation's families and small businesses.